

DRAFT COMPATIBILITY DETERMINATION

USE: Berry Picking

REFUGE NAME: Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

ESTABLISHING AUTHORITY: Migratory Bird Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. §715d)

REFUGE PURPOSE: "...for use as an inviolate sanctuary, or for any other management purpose, for migratory birds." (16 U.S.C. §715d)

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM:

To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans. (16 U.S.C. §3901(b))

DESCRIPTION OF USE

(a) What is the use? Is the use a priority public use?

This use consists of Refuge visitors picking beach plums and cranberries on the Refuge. This is not a priority public use, but is a historical use.

(b) Where would the use be conducted?

Cranberry picking will be conducted at two designated areas: the cranberry bog at North Beach Access and the cranberry bog in the North Pool Field. Beach plum picking will be conducted along roads, parking lots, and walking trails. A visitor must stay on walking trails and road and within 25 feet of Refuge parking lots while picking beach plums.

(c) When would the use be conducted?

The use is conducted during normal Refuge hours (sunrise to sundown) from Labor Day to October 31.

(d) How would the use be conducted?

Visitors will pick by hand, up to one quart of cranberries or beach plums per day. Visitors must park in designated parking lots. To get to the North Beach Access Bog, visitors will park at Lot #2, walk up the boardwalk, and get off the boardwalk to the left at the start of the handrails.

(e) Why is this use being proposed?

This is a historical use that has been continued after Refuge establishment.

AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES:

The Refuge has three law enforcement officers that provide resource protection and monitoring of public use at the time this use occurs. This activity requires additional

effort on the part of the law enforcement officers, as they have to monitor visitors in an otherwise closed area. The activity can be supported with existing staff resources.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS OF THE USE:

Although the impacts of berry picking to wildlife at Parker River Refuge have not been studied, there are several direct and indirect impacts anticipated from this activity.

The dunes at Parker River Refuge have been closed to public use because of the overwhelming research showing significant damage to the fragile dune system due to human traffic. The cranberry bogs are unique habitats within the dune system that provide the island's wildlife its only source of fresh drinking water in an otherwise saline environment. The bogs are also home to various unique or rare plants, as well as many breeding amphibians and reptiles.

Visitors walking through the dunes to access the cranberries may trample dune plants, leaving the dunes susceptible to erosion. While in the bog, visitors may trample rare plants that grow in the bogs. Visitors can also transport exotic plant seeds or disease to the dune and bogs. Invasive plant species are a growing threat to resource conservation at Parker River Refuge, and transport via footwear is one way invasive spread to new areas. Visitors can also bring new fungal or bacterial diseases to the bog which can infect breeding amphibians. Visitors walking through the dunes and bog may displace wildlife. The disturbance is expected to be higher in and around the bog, where wildlife tends to concentrate. Disturbance to wildlife is typically higher when pedestrian use occurs off established trails (Miller *et. al.* 1998).

The removal of beach plums and cranberry may also negatively impact wildlife. This impact is likely negligible for cranberries as there is little evidences that wildlife consume cranberries to any great extent. There is also little human demand for cranberries. However, there is high human demand for beach plums. Typically, within 2 weeks of Labor Day, the majority of beach plums adjacent to the road and trails have been picked. Beach plums are an important food source for several migratory birds (jays, grosbeaks, cardinals) as well as resident mammals (deer, rabbit, raccoons, etc.). Picking of beach plums may remove a source of food from the wildlife at a time when they have the highest energetic demands – storing fat for migration or winter.

PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT:

This Compatibility Determination is provided for public comment for a 14-day period, from December 15 to 29, 2004. Availability of the draft CD iss advertised through a legal notice in the local newspaper, press release, flyers at the Refuge entrance gate and other public areas, and through the Refuge's web site.

DETERMINATION (check one below):

☐ Use is Not Compatible

☒ Use is Compatible With the Following Stipulations

STIPULATIONS NECESSARY TO ENSURE COMPATIBILITY:

- Continue to provide berry-pickers information sheet showing access path to minimize disturbance to dune vegetation and wildlife.
- Establish a permit system to monitor the extent of use.
- Continue to limit the quantity of fruit picked per day to minimize harvest.
- Educate visitors on responsible use of national wildlife refuges and how to minimize impacts to the dunes and wildlife.

LITERATURE CITED:

Miller, S.G., R.L. Knight, and C.K Miller. 1998. Influence of recreational trails on breeding bird communities. *Ecological Applications*. 8(1) 162-169.

Signature – Refuge Manager: _____
(Signature and Date)

Concurrence – Regional Chief: _____
(Signature and Date)

Mandatory 10 – year Reevaluation Date: _____Dec. 31, 2009_____